

## ON COLOR CHARACTERS AS SPECIFIC CRITERIA.

It may at times seem that the writer lays overmuch emphasis on the fallibility of color descriptions of insect species. Seeing is believing, so here is a current example.

A recent revision of the coleopterous genus *Buprestis* yields these amazing figures. In this genus there have been, as listed by the reviser, 115 species described; of these, only 24, slightly more than 20%, are valid; 91, or nearly 80% are invalid redescriptions of the 24 valid species! On the face of the color specific names *alone*, 35 species were described by color; only 9 of these are valid. That is, about two-thirds of these descriptions were on an unstable basis!

This is a purely factual argument. Color is at times a useful supporting character. We must always try to bear in mind that a species is a definite entity, and that a change in color does not indicate a change in being. Were the last true, a red-faced man would be a different species from a pale man, which is absurd; he would even be specifically different from his original paler self; which is ridiculous. A man tanned by sun and wind would differ specifically from his own white-skinned sheltered children—another patent absurdity.

The latent fallacy in a color-description lies in an ingenuous belief in the fixity and permanence of color. But it is common knowledge that color in insects is in general physiological; that it depends on many factors—age, food, temperature, season, and on numerous other factors, some known, others not. Exception is here specifically made of structural colors; and even these may be individual or group departures from the norm, brought about by external causes.

The writer often wonders what the species concept really is. Current ideas on the subject are as full of subjective concepts and cloudy verbiage as the brain-children of an adept metaphysician.

Let anyone who is in disagreement with these remarks searchingly examine his own idea of what really makes a species a species; and then come out boldly to objectively controvert these remarks.

Species are real entities; or they are not. Species exist objectively in the material plane; or they exist subjectively only and are no more valid than the hasheesh-eater's dreams of the Houris in Paradise.

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